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# Grounded Theory Approach to Describe Korean Organizational Members Transferring Knowledge

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## Abstract

*This paper presents the findings of an interpretive study into organizational members' experiences transferring knowledge over time. Using a grounded theory research approach, the study characterizes the organizational members' knowledge transfer experiences in terms of win-win type, caring we-group type, pursuing self-interests type, feeling dependent type, self-centered type, and indifferent avoidance type. These findings are used to develop a theoretical framework for conceptualizing the individual physical and psychological issues around the knowledge transfer-issues that have been largely missing from contemporary discussions of knowledge transfer. The paper thus has important implications for research and practice. Specifically, the framework and findings suggest that in order to account for the experiences and outcomes associated with knowledge transfer, researchers should consider we-ness, self-interests, and feeling state of individuals in organizations, and the diverse type of knowledge transfer such as partial and complete transfer as well as fast and slow knowledge transfer. Similarly, the paper suggests that practitioners will be better able to manage their organizational members' experiences with knowledge transfer.*

**Keywords:** Knowledge Transfer, Qualitative Study, Grounded Theory

## 1. Introduction

The new paradigm, knowledge management, has received attention since the 1990's with Drucker's (1993) knowledge society and interest in knowledge that originated in 20th century philosophy (Cole, 1998). The definition of knowledge management differs with every approach; however, it is generally referred to as the series of management activities that forms organizational knowledge from knowledge scattered throughout the organization and improves business performance through information technology, which enhances organizational knowledge utilization. Knowledge management has been actively researched in various fields of business administration during the 1990s. That is, various studies about knowledge management were carried out, such as researches on the concepts of knowledge management and on competitive advantages (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Prahalad & Hamel, 1990), methodologies of realizing knowledge management (Wiig, 1997), and construction of an information system (Leonard-Barton, 1995). In addition, firms are investing great amounts of money to implement a knowledge management system, setting up positions, such as a Knowledge Executive in charge of knowledge management and Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO) (Sarvary, 1999).

In spite of the high interest of the academic and business world, the application of knowledge management in firms is not successful (Lee, 1999; Huh, 2000; Ambrosio, 2000). Lee & Jeong (1999) pointed out that the reason was due to the fact that previous studies were indifferent to the individual, who is a subject of the behavior of knowledge management, when compared to the organization. However, this can be considered a natural phenomenon since knowledge

management is performed with focus on the company.

The substance of knowledge management, as done in previous researches, can be summarized into two cases (Ruggles, 1998). The first case is the matter of re-use of knowledge that organization members are aware of (O'Leary, 1998; Davenport, 1996; Mason, 1992; Malone & Rockart, 1993; Blanning & David, 1995; Lank, 1997; Sviokla, 1996; Ruggles, 1998). Second, there is knowledge creation, which creates new knowledge that the organization does not currently have (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Nonaka & Konno, 1998; von Krogh, 1998). There is a prerequisite for these two aspects of knowledge management to be achieved. Somebody in an organization must transfer her or his knowledge to other members of the organization. If this behavior of knowledge transfer are not present, re-use of knowledge cannot occur. Also, in knowledge creation, new knowledge must be created from an individual and then transferred to others or an organization. Therefore, knowledge management in both aspects is possible only when individuals possess the intention to transfer their knowledge to the organization, which in turn must be connected to the behavior of knowledge transfer. If so, what kind of state (psychological and physical states) influences the organizational member's intention to transfer their knowledge? Also, what are the necessary conditions to connect this intention with the actual behavior? We have to consider these questions. Furthermore, since there is a giver and a receiver in knowledge transfer, it can be said that knowledge transfer is related to the psychological and social relationship formed by the parties, and that the type of knowledge transferred needs to be considered.

Until now, previous researches have presented several factors that influence knowledge transfer in a personal level. The influencing factors presented in previous studies include the degree of trust between individuals (Kramer, 1999; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998), willingness to share individual knowledge (Kramer, 1999), the characteristics of the knowledge recipient (Kym & Jeong, 2002), social context (Kramer, 1999; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998; Kym & Jeong, 2002), characteristics of knowledge (Hansen, 1999), and the characteristics of the knowledge management system (Kym & Jeong, 2002). However, these studies presented factors that affect knowledge transfer only in a cognition dimension, and did not suggest the elements that affect the intention and the actual act of knowledge transfer. That is, previous researches indicated that an individual's willingness to transfer is an important variable in knowledge transfer. However, because they focused on only the act of knowledge transfer, they could not explain why the intention to transfer occurs and how this intention is developed into an act.

Intention means a personal future behavior that was expected or planned and is the subjective probability of the faith and attitude that is carried over to an act (Engel & Blackwell, 1982). This intention, however, does not immediately prompt the action. Differences were found in the time interval and situation between the intention and the acts. Personal effort, time, and tools are necessary for the intention of personal knowledge transfer to be connected to an act. That is, even though a person has an intention to transfer his or her knowledge to others, it is not easy because the person has to sacrifice one's own time and energy to transfer their own knowledge.

Without in-depth consideration into the intention and behavior, previous researches presented a general prescription, such as evaluation and compensation based on mileage, education, and change management, for the success of knowledge management. We must think about the feasibility of whether knowledge management can succeed with these simple prescriptions. Therefore, this research attempted to understand more deeply the physical condition (e.g.,

time and space) and psychological state of individuals who are placed in an organization carrying out knowledge management. As such, the core research questions are: first, what kinds of conditions form the intention for knowledge transfer in individuals? Second, what kind of element is needed in the connection of knowledge transfer intention with an act? In order to answer these questions, this research uses the grounded theory approach, one of qualitative research methodologies instead of a quantitative research methodology. Grounded theory is one of the effective methodologies in the field of organization studies and management information systems (Ancona, 1990; Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; Isabella, 1990; Kahn, 1990; Orlikowski, 1993; Pettigrew, 1990). The reasons for the use of grounded theory are as follows:

First, this study is to understand the physical and psychological state of organization members in a knowledge management action. Qualitative research is more suitable using in-depth interview or observation than quantitative empirical analysis because the phenomena are particular and vague. Second, by focusing on the process and elements of change, the grounded theory is appropriate for the understanding of the object of this study, which is to understand the personal intention of knowledge transfer as well as the process and condition connected with this intention. Third, researches on the physical and psychological state of organization members in knowledge transfer are limited. Therefore, the use of grounded theory in this research was able to supplement the insufficiency of the initial studies, and aided the establishment of the provisional theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

## **2. Research Methods**

“Grounded theory is a *general methodology* for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed”(Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p.273). The focus is on developing theory from data, rather than on generating theory from *a priori* assumptions or hypotheses. The approach is often referred to as the constant *comparative method* because the “theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection”(p.273). By definition, the emphasis in the practice of grounded theory is on generating theory.

### **2.1 Sampling Method: Theoretical Sampling**

This study used the theoretical sampling to select the object to be able to show the object of study. In theoretical sampling the researcher extracts samples based on the concept, and there is a search for conditions and dimensions to change a property of a concept. Theoretical sampling of Glaser & Strauss (1967) requires paying attention to the theoretical relevance and purpose. With respect to relevance, Eisenhardt (1988) noted, that it “is likely to replicate or extend the emergent theory” (p.537). Thus, individuals in organizations carrying out knowledge management were chosen in this study. Of course, knowledge management systems and knowledge management activities in each organization have a difference, but their basic philosophies are the same in that knowledge management is an activity which transfers and uses knowledge and improves the competitiveness of an organization. Because the purpose of the research is to generate theory applicable to various organizational contexts and various individual contexts, differences were sought in organizational and individual conditions such as the degree of usage of knowledge management system, industry, size, system, and climate in organizational dimension, and gender, age, position, and department in an individual dimension.

### **2.2 Data Collection**

In each organization, data were collected through a variety of methods: semi-structured

interviewing, and official and unofficial documentation review. Data collection and analysis proceeded iteratively (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) with the early stages of the research. The collection and analysis in this study were performed from June to October in 2003. Because it reached the theoretical saturation that new concepts and categories were generated in the data collected, the period was not extended. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend the number of sampling be reached at the point of saturation or redundancy. They said, "In purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units; thus redundancy is the primary criterion." According to this recommendation, this study extends the number of interviewee up to 49 until no information is forthcoming. The duration of the interview differed in every case, but it usually took approximately forty minutes to one and half hours.

### **2.3 Data Analysis Method**

This section presents an overview of the data analysis process used throughout this study. The data analysis began during the data collection stage of the study. As I began conducting interviews, more finely directed questions evolved from the emerging data. Strauss & Corbin (1990) identifies the following main points in the coding process: open coding, axial coding, selective coding, and theoretical saturation. These are discussed below.

*Open Coding.* The researcher begins by coding each incident in the data with as many concepts as possible. For conceptualization of raw data, name "concepts" on the phenomenon according to meaning about a sentence while the researcher reads every line of transcribed scripts. Once all the data were examined, the concepts were organized by recurring theme. These themes became prime candidates for a set of stable and common categories, which linked a number of associated concepts.

*Axial Coding.* In axial coding the researcher begins identifying connections between categories, and across respondents responses. These connections might be made based upon the existing data, or they may raise new hypotheses that lead to additional questions to pursue in data collection. Axial coding is the process of relating codes (categories and properties) to each other, via a combination of inductive and deductive thinking. To simplify this process, rather than look for any and all kind of relations, grounded theorists emphasize causal relationships, and fit things into a paradigm model of generic relationships.

*Selective Coding.* Selective coding is the process of choosing one category to be the core category, and relating all other categories to that category. The essential idea is to develop a single storyline around which all everything else is draped. The core category serves to organize the model. Selective coding is to find patterns which repetitive relationships between properties and dimensions of categories for forming the paradigm.

### **2.4 Evaluating Criteria of Research Results**

**Credibility.** The data and findings that are produced through qualitative inquiry will more likely be credible. Therefore, the research tried to secure a realistic value through the use of triangulation (using multiple data sources and collection methods). First of all, the researcher examined the situations about knowledge management of selected organizations through knowledge management related journals and newspapers. Also, the researcher found out the actual conditions of knowledge management through organization members worked in the companies. Also, In-depth interviews were performed with 49 participants in ten firms and five participants executed an interview twice. The interview duration was different in every

case, but it usually took approximately from forty minutes to one and half hours.

**Transferability.** As Lincoln & Guba (1985) summarizes, it is “not the naturalist’s task to provide an *index* of transferability; it is his or her responsibility to provide the *data base* that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential applies”(p.316). By confirmation work about the research results in order to get over subjective limitations in this study, the researcher had different people who are not participations in this study read the result of the study and to confirm it. That is, the researcher presented the study results to three people in the three different firms carrying out knowledge management and confirmed whether the results explained their knowledge transfer experience well. As the result, the concepts and the categories appeared in this study were understood in comparatively appropriate terms and therefore, the transferability of the research result was secured.

**Dependability.** While conventional reliability is not applicable, the reader of a qualitative inquiry should be confident that the process of inquiry is consistent, internally coherent, and ethically aboveboard. Furthermore, the reader should be confident that the findings are grounded in the data, logical in terms of the data, and acceptable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp.301-327). The researcher did the best to abide by the procedures and process using a grounded theory and to secure objectivity in the analysis process. Also, the discussion process was scanned through five Ph.D students, trained in qualitative research methodology, in order to clarify the concepts. The researcher presented the concepts extracted from this study, and requested the Ph.D students to categorize them. Consequently, quite similar categories were drawn.

### **3. Research Results**

#### **3.1 Study Participants**

There were a total of 49 participants who were selected from ten companies in this study. The target companies consisted of three manufacturing companies, one financial company, one research institute, three system integration companies, one consulting company, and one communication service company. The age of participants ranged from the mid twenties to the mid forties. They consisted of 23 females and 26 males. The average period of work at the organization was six years and seven months, and ranged from three months to 17 years. They were composed of five juniors, twelve seniors, fifteen junior managers, one senior manager, four chiefs of a department, four junior researchers, and eight senior researchers. There were five sales persons, two marketers, fourteen researchers, three system developers, ten consultants, and five planners. And two participants worked in the financial and accounting part, and five were in charge of foreign exchange and small and medium industry assistance.

#### **3.2 Categories Analysis by Paradigm Model**

The researcher found concepts from the data through an interview and categorized them using constant comparative method. There are 93 concepts, 38 sub-categories, and 12 categories. Grounded theory relates categories to each other, via a combination of inductive and deductive thinking. To simplify this process, rather than look for any and all kinds of relations, grounded theorists emphasize causal relationships, and fit things into a paradigm model of generic relationships. Figure 3.1 shows a paradigm model of transferring knowledge in organizations.

##### **3.2.1 Recognition of others need for knowledge**

Generally, the trigger that induced the transfer of knowledge was when the participants realized that another department or team members needed their knowledge. Therefore, in most cases, when a person directly requested for knowledge, the participants were found debating whether to transfer or not transfer their knowledge. Furthermore, the participants went through the similar debate even when they were aware of the other person's work or the solution to a problem the person was in even though the person did not request for it. This is evident in the sub-categories "*request*" and "*recognition of need without a request*," both of which are under the "*recognition of others need for knowledge*" category.

### ***3.2.2 Self-satisfaction through the expansion of one's knowledge***

As mentioned previously, the intention of knowledge transfer is usually induced by the recognition of the other's need, yet, it is also made possible through the feeling of self-satisfaction that one's knowledge is expanding. Therefore, participants think of transferring knowledge when they feel that their knowledge is of worth or when they acquire new knowledge. Such behaviors will be called "*happiness from the creation of knowledge*" and "*happiness from the acquisition of knowledge*." These sub-categories put into the umbrella category of "*self-satisfaction through the expansion of one's knowledge*."

### ***3.2.3 Intention of transfer of knowledge or non-transfer of knowledge***

Participants consider transferring knowledge or putting it into KMS when they become aware of the need for the transfer of the knowledge or due to happiness from the creation of knowledge or the acquiring of knowledge. The intention to transfer or not transfer knowledge is occurred according to contextual conditions as next section will present. This section, "*Intention of transfer of knowledge or non-transfer of knowledge*," has been further divided into the sub-categories "*debating knowledge transfer*," "*cause of the intention of knowledge transfer*," and "*cause of the intention to not transfer knowledge*."

### ***3.2.4 We-ness<sup>1</sup>***

This section points out the fact that the participants intention to transfer knowledge can be strengthened or weakened according to the person the knowledge is being given to. Therefore, the participants have trust and feel Jeong<sup>2</sup> towards people they are familiar with, their team members, co-workers, and those they like, thus desiring to help these kinds of people so that they will not experience any hardship. Accordingly, this category has been divided into the sub-categories "*relationships with Jeong*," "*trust on we-group members*," and "*understanding we-group members*."

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<sup>1</sup> Choi & Lee (1999) points out that the 'we' in Korean culture possesses a stronger degree of attachment than the western concept of 'we' or the in-group defined in social psychology. Koreans' concept of 'our-side,' not on the actual behavioral level, but in a social aspect, holds the meaning of oneness and sameness.

<sup>2</sup> In Korean we-relationships, Jeong has great significance. In fact, the relationships can be seen as being held together by Jeong. The concept of Jeong is similar to the western sentiments of affection and love. And yet, unlike the passionate and fast-paced emotion that is characteristic of love, Jeong is an emotion that develops gradually without one's conscious effort (Choi & Lee, 1999). In addition, Jeong is the most representative psychological experience that displays the closeness and attachment Koreans share in a relationship. Jeong is also a measurement of the closeness and attachment between persons within the relationship. All in all, Jeong can be understood as the representative psychological characteristic in Korean relationships (Kim, 1986; Kim, 1997; Choi, 1997).

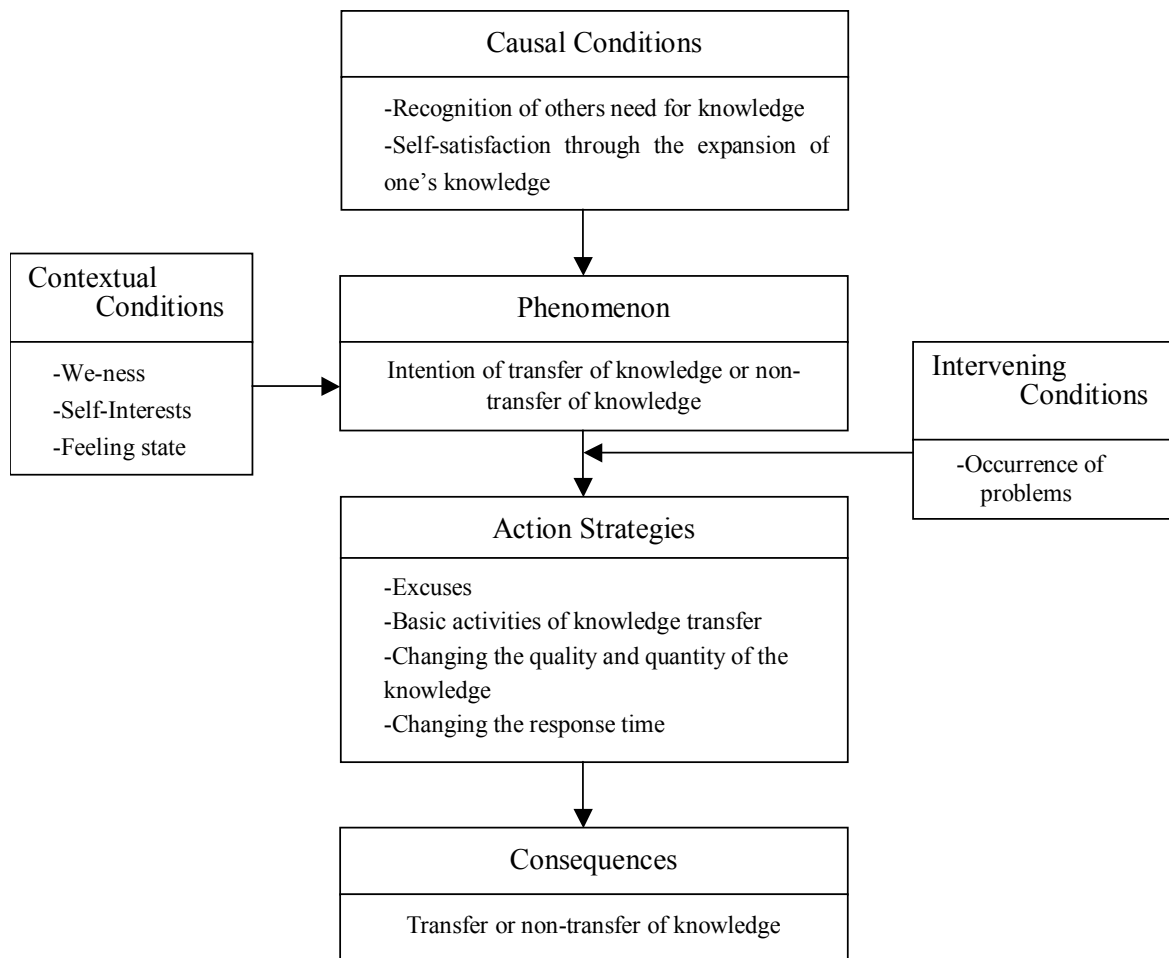


Figure 3.1. A Paradigm Model of Knowledge Transfer

### 3.2.5 Self-interests

The participants debated on the benefits that they would receive if knowledge was transferred to people outside the in-group. And if the participants felt that they would experience some disadvantage, they decided not to transfer the knowledge. However, if some kind of benefit was assured the participants, their intention to transfer knowledge would arise. This category has been consisted of the sub-categories “*considering cooperation*,” “*efficiency of work*,” “*political calculation*,” “*maintaining social face*,” “*competition*,” “*considering benefits according to the type of knowledge*,” “*evaluation and obligation of KMS utilization*,” “*considering benefits according to the company’s climate*,” and “*quantity of time and effort*.”

### 3.2.6 Feeling State

The feeling state of the participants has an influence on decision to transfer or not transfer knowledge. Many strategies of transferring and not transferring is being formed according to the feeling states. Feeling states can be divided into two sub-categories, “*the positive feeling state*” and “*the negative feeling state*.” These sub-categories are then further divided into “*simple feeling*” concept and “*relational feeling*” concept. “*Simple feeling*” can be defined as the feeling states a person is in when being requested for knowledge, recognizing the need of transfer, and before transfer of knowledge. Thus an example of simple feeling would be good mood, bad mood, and stress. “*Relational feeling*” is an emotion that arises due to the requester of the knowledge. It has been discovered that relational feeling affects the transfer of knowledge more than simple feelings. Participants’ intention to transfer knowledge is



strengthened with a positive feeling state. However, the negative feeling state the participants are in during knowledge transfer or when requests are received weakens the intention to transfer knowledge.

### **3.2.7 Occurrence of problems**

Although the participant may have the intention to transfer knowledge, if a number of problems arise, the transfer is inhibited. Thus this category is consisted of “*problems of time*”, “*forgetfulness*”, and “*problems with knowledge*”. The participant had the intention of transferring knowledge later, but the due date was missed, or if the participant is extremely busy, the transfer of knowledge is impossible. The intention of transferring knowledge may be hindered by forgetfulness. If the person who requests the knowledge reminds the person being asked of the material, it may be transferred; however, when transfer of knowledge is for one’s self satisfaction or need, then the knowledge is not transferred. The transfer of knowledge is inhibited even though the participants have intention to transfer when they want to give the knowledge to the requester, but knowledge cannot be found and when the participant doesn’t have the confidence of their material.

### **3.2.8 Excuses**

The participants were found making excuses for knowledge that wasn’t transferred. These excuses included “*pretending to be busy*,” “*pretending to not have the knowledge*,” “*claiming that the knowledge is incomplete*,” “*demanding the purpose of the requester*,” “*lying that it is confidential*,” and “*avoidance*” of a certain time.

### **3.2.9 Basic activities of knowledge transfer**

In case the participant has the intention of transferring knowledge, the tacit knowledge is given form or knowledge seeking activities are performed. It is consisted of two sub-categories, “*making explicit knowledge*” and “*knowledge seeking*”. These have been combined into the category of “*basic activities of knowledge transfer*.” Tacit knowledge is actualized through the activity of producing it into written documents or computer files. Even if such activity does not take place, knowledge is transferred through the participant’s explanation or in most cases written form. In order to transfer knowledge, the participant searches for the existing knowledge or researches other sources one does not know and then transfers it.

### **3.2.10 Changing the quality and quantity of the knowledge**

Participants were found following a certain strategy of changing the quality and quantity of knowledge that needed to be transferred according to the degree of one’s intention to give. The more one considered the other person as a part of themselves, the more benefits that comes to them, the more one is in a positive state of mind, the quality of the work was better. Therefore, there are cases when one’s general knowledge, skills and experience are completely transferred, however, there can be times when only a part of it is transferred. Thus this kind of behavior can be put into the sub-categories of “*the complete knowledge transferring*” and “*the partial knowledge transferring*”, both of which are under the category of “*changing quality and quantity of the knowledge*”.

### **3.2.11 Changing the response time**

The time of transferring knowledge is also dependent on the degree of one’s intention to give. When the participant’s intention is strong, then the time of transfer is quick. However, when the intention is weak, the transfer time is slow. Also, to those who they associate with themselves is strong or when it is beneficial for them, the intention to transfer knowledge is

strong and the participants transfer knowledge before being requested. However, when there is no strong intention, the participants wait until someone requests for the knowledge. The time differences can be put into the sub-categories of “*changing the time of transfer*” and “*transfer before and after a request*,” both of which are the category of “*changing the response time*”.

### **3.2.12 Transfer or non-transfer of knowledge**

The intention to transfer knowledge that arises from recognizing other’s need for the knowledge or one’s happiness ultimately results in the transfer of knowledge to the requester or putting knowledge into KMS. Oppositely, knowledge was not transferred when the participant did not have the intention of transferring the knowledge or when a problem occurred between the intention and the actual transferring action. These types of behaviors can be distinguished as “*the transfer of knowledge*” and “*the non-transfer of knowledge*,” both of which fall under the category of “*transfer or non-transfer of knowledge*.”

### **3.3 Core Category: ‘Knowledge Transfer for Me and Us’**

After analyzing paradigm model, we choose one category to be the core category, and relating all other categories to that category. The essential idea is to develop a single storyline around which all everything else is draped. The core category serves to organize the model.

While relations between categories have become clear, and properties and dimensions of concepts and categories have been presented clearly, we found that the knowledge transfer process of organizational members is the process for participants themselves and people who they think as ‘us’. Though transferring knowledge to others was a behavior to help others and was very unselfish and altruistic, the participants had the thought of transferring knowledge for their own good rather than for others. We name it ‘Knowledge Transfer for Me and Us’.

The elements that had made the behavior of knowledge transfer were ‘We-ness’, ‘Self-interests’, and ‘Feeling state’. Participants showed that they transferred their knowledge to ‘us’ who were not participants themselves but others, and they were close to participants under the ‘we-ness.’ The participants felt Jeong toward ‘us’, and wanted to transfer knowledge to ‘us’ unsparingly, and wish ‘us’ to be good. Therefore, they transferred their experience and know-how as well as business knowledge, working overtime for ‘us’, even if they were very busy. On the other hand, they considered first of all their benefits or interests toward other people. Thus, if they think the behavior of transferring knowledge has a negative influence on their benefits, they did not transfer their knowledge. However, if they think it can be good for them, they transferred knowledge to others even though they didn’t want to transfer it emotionally. In the feeling state, participants wanted to transfer their knowledge in with a good feeling both in simple feelings and relational feelings, but they did not want to transfer it in a negative feeling state.

Therefore, the properties of ‘Knowledge Transfer for Me and Us’ consisted of egoism and altruism. The egoism means to conduct the pursuit of only my own benefits or interests (Korean Language Academic Society, 1994). It means the behavior of participants transferring their knowledge or not transferring it depended on their benefits. Altruism means to sacrifice oneself for other persons (Korean Language Academic Society, 1994). It refers to the behavior of participants transferring their knowledge to ‘us’ while sacrificing their own time and effort.

At first, the dimensions of egoism are from ‘Thinking about me first’ to ‘Not thinking about

me first' and from 'Rational judgment' to 'Emotional judgment'. When participants judge the knowledge requester as an other person, not 'us', they considered mainly their benefits earned from their behavior instead of understanding the other person's difficulty. Generally, they intended to transfer their knowledge to an other person at the time of a positive feeling state, but they transferred the knowledge even in negative feelings states if they judged it to be helpful to their own benefits. They thought that to form an amicable personal relationship is convenient to do business in the future, and they transferred their knowledge even in their negative feelings. That is, they considered how profitable the giving of knowledge was to them. The participants did not transfer their knowledge to others because the knowledge is necessary for them. Therefore, they used strategies that change the quantity and quality of knowledge transferred and the knowledge transfer speed in consideration of their feeling state or benefits. Outwardly they seemed to transfer their knowledge to others and the knowledge requesters thought they received the necessary knowledge from the participants. In fact, they did not transfer their whole knowledge, but they pretended to transfer knowledge formally. The egoism is based on rational judgment rather than feelings. The participants made a calculation of profits and losses about how much time they had to invest to transfer their knowledge, how much effort to need, or how important the knowledge was. And then, they acted for the profit of the best.

On the other hand, the dimensions of altruism are from 'understanding others' difficulty' to 'not understanding others' difficulty' and from 'Sacrificing oneself' to 'Not sacrificing oneself'. The reason why participants transferred the knowledge to the people who was considered 'us' was because they understood the difficulties of the people. They worried the difficult situation of the people and thought of their own difficult experiences. Thus they did not want the 'us' to experience the difficulties. Therefore, they transferred all the knowledge that they had. If they do not have the knowledge that the people requested, they searched it from other sources and transferred it. They sacrificed their time even if they were busy. Besides, they considered an understanding degree of the requesters and if they thought the requesters need more help, they transferred more knowledge until the requesters understood it completely. Participants wanted to help the people who they thought 'us' more and give anything unsparingly. If they were not able to transfer the knowledge that the people requested, they felt sorry for them. Because, basically, they thought that they had to help 'us'.

### ***3.4 Hypothetical Formalization and Analyzing the Patterns of 'Knowledge Transfer for Me and Us'***

Hypothetical formalization is the first stage of the process of pattern analysis to find patterns and to formalize relational patterns between core category and contextual categories. The study shows the result of hypothetical formalization in table 3.1. It is presented in relational patterns between the core categories, '*Knowledge Transfer for Me and Us*' and the contextual conditions, '*We-ness*', '*Self-interests*' and '*Feeling state*' in considering properties and dimensions of each contextual category. Pattern analysis is used to compare the results of hypothetical formalization and hypothetical relation statements with grounded data, and to show the types appeared repeatedly between categories. The researcher found out six types of the knowledge transfer

Table 3.1 Hypothetical Formalization for '*Knowledge Transfer for Me and Us*'

| Core Category                       | We-ness | Self-interests | Feeling State |
|-------------------------------------|---------|----------------|---------------|
| 1) Knowledge Transfer for Me and Us | Strong  | Positive       | Positive      |
| 2) Knowledge Transfer for Me and Us | Weak    | Positive       | Positive      |

|                                     |        |          |          |
|-------------------------------------|--------|----------|----------|
| 3) Knowledge Transfer for Me and Us | Strong | Negative | Positive |
| 4) Knowledge Transfer for Me and Us | Weak   | Negative | Positive |
| 5) Knowledge Transfer for Me and Us | Strong | Positive | Negative |
| 6) Knowledge Transfer for Me and Us | Weak   | Positive | Negative |
| 7) Knowledge Transfer for Me and Us | Strong | Negative | Negative |
| 8) Knowledge Transfer for Me and Us | Weak   | Negative | Negative |

in organization performing knowledge management. These types are not specific personal types, but they are the situation types that show the situations to transfer knowledge. Most participants have six types of knowledge transfer experiences in the study. However, some participants have a specific type of knowledge transfer experience and other participants have a different type of experience. To explain each type specifically, the researcher classifies the participants according to each type and presents concrete contents of each knowledge transfer type in this study.

**Win-Win Type:** The participants in this type were understanding of the other's difficulties, which allowed them to recognize the need of the others before being requested and considered the transfer of knowledge as beneficial. Also, because the participants were asked when in a positive emotional state, the intention to transfer knowledge was strong. The extra effort needed for the transfer of knowledge was actively done and transferred quickly.

**Caring We-Group Type:** The participants were found having a strong feeling of we-ness toward others, thus being characterized by the transfer of knowledge although it may be a disadvantage for them. These types of people tried to make extra time to help and take the extra effort to find the needed knowledge. Not only did they transfer requested knowledge, but they also transferred their own experiences and know how related to that work. Therefore, rather than logic, the factors of we-ness and a positive feeling state worked as the main forces in the transfer of knowledge.

**Pursuing Self-Interests Type:** The participants in this type had a weak we-ness of the requester and calculated their own interests rather than that of the requester. Therefore, due to the gaining of self-interests, they transferred knowledge in regardless of positive or negative feeling state.

**Feeling Dependent Type:** The participants were close to the requesters and had a strong we-ness towards them, therefore, did not calculate self-benefits that the transfer may bring. Therefore, although the participants' simple feeling state may be negative at the moment of being requested the knowledge, they showed the intention to transfer knowledge and searched for the requested knowledge. However, if the participants experienced a severely negative relational emotion from the requester, they expressed much disappointment and did not transfer knowledge.

**Self-Centered Type:** The participants in this type had a were not familiar with the requesters and had a weak we-ness towards them, thus the participants considered self-interests and did not transfer knowledge if there were no-self interests despite a positive or negative emotional state.

**Indifferent Avoidance Type:** The participants in this type were not close the requesters and did not have a strong we-ness towards them. They perceived the transfer of knowledge as

completely unbeneficial and were in a negative feeling state, which naturally produced no intention to transfer, thus leading to non-transfer of knowledge. Especially when knowledge was transferred into KMS, most participants were uncomfortable about the fact that the knowledge could spread to just anyone and not to only to their teammates.

#### **4. Conclusions**

This study attempted at understanding the physical and psychological situation of an individual during the time of knowledge transfer on a deeper level. This study has several important contributions to academics as well as practitioners. The academic contributions are as follows:

First, in previous researches, the organization member's view of the provider's psychological factor, the emotional state during the transfer and the physical situation has been neglected. However, the result of this study shows that when the members of an organization transfer knowledge, the psychological factors such as we-ness, self-interests, and relational feeling state and the physical factors such as problems of time, and systems are all significant factors.

Secondly, previous researches, the transfer of knowledge was divided into only transferring and non-transferring of knowledge, however, according to the results of this study, various types of transfer, such as partial and complete transfer as well as fast and slow transfer, were discovered. Also, the time of transferring varied from fast and slow transfer. Therefore, the diverse types of transfer must be considered in knowledge transfer researches.

As for practical contributions, this study presents the importance of we-ness, self-interests, and both negative and positive feeling states in an organization member's knowledge transfer. It also shows various strategies taken in response to the occurrence of intention and how the intention is connected to the actual behavior, as well as the physical and psychological states when the intention is not followed by actual behavior. Thus this study proves to be capable of measuring the intention and behavior of knowledge transfer between members in an organization. Moreover, through the development of a knowledge transfer evaluation tool, the degree of an organization's knowledge transfer can be measured.

Before concluding this study, we admit the limitations of this research hopefully to provide some direction for future research. First, this study was based on the grounded theory approach. Moreover, this study aimed at the in-depth understanding of the knowledge transfer phenomenon rather than the generalization of the results in knowledge management. Therefore, 49 participants from ten different companies performing knowledge management were interviewed. Through the interviews, the 'knowledge transfer for me and us theory' of the intention and behaviors of knowledge transfer were presented. However, in order to increase the possibility of the theory's generalization, a quantitative research must be done.

Secondly, in this study, the ethical issues related to types of knowledge were not discussed. Because the research focused on the case for participants to transfer their knowledge to members of the same organization, they did not consider ethical problems. However, some participants transferred confidential of their departments to colleagues of other departments. The researcher understood this as Jeong principles appeared in we-group relationship. Therefore, the ethical issues of the organizational members which can be proposed by the viewpoint of public principles have been neglected. Following researches will attempt considering the ethical issues of organizational members regarding knowledge transfer.

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